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ONE OF THE OLD GUARD

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By
CONSTANCE CAMPBELL

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NEW YORK
SAMUEL FRENCH
PUBLISHER
28-30 WEST 38TH STREET

LONDON
SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD
26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET
STRAND

75635
29 C1248

©Cl.D 37591C

JUL 16 1914

TMP92-008791

ONE OF THE OLD GUARD

Produced on April 16, 1914, The Church Institute, Strand -
on-the-Green, Chiswick.

CHARACTERS.

- HENRY ROBINSON . . . *A well-preserved, vigorous man of
about sixty.*
- MARY ROBINSON . . . *His wife, a gentle, rather cowed-
looking woman.*
- DOROTHY ROBINSON . . . *His daughter.*
- MURIEL ROBINSON . . . *His daughter.*

TIME.—*The Present.*

The action takes place in ROBINSON'S study.

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ONE OF THE OLD GUARD

The action takes place in ROBINSON'S study. The furniture is solid, substantial, uncompromising, and was probably a wedding present to his father. There are some old-fashioned engravings on the walls, battle and hunting scenes and the like, and some photographs of racing-horses. There is a roll-top writing-table in the corner near the window, a table in the middle of room littered with newspapers, and on a small one there are glasses and spirit decanter.

MURIEL and DOROTHY are standing one on each side of the fireplace. A door bangs. DOROTHY stiffens herself, clasping her hands behind her back. MURIEL fixes her eyes uneasily on the door.

MURIEL. Now for it!

DOROTHY. A strong pull and a long pull! But won't there be a jolly bust-up! But united we stand——

MURIEL. If only mother doesn't cave in.

DOROTHY. It's now or never. What a mercy he wants to go into Parliament! That'll help to put the screw on.

ROBINSON (*comes in*). It's just upon eleven. The deputation will be round about twelve. Before adopting me finally as candidate, they want to be sure that my views are quite sound. (*Rubs his hands.*) Well, they'll stand the test all right, I've no doubt about that. (*Sits at table c.*)

DOROTHY (*with meaning*). It's a question of money, isn't it? Views generally are.

ROBINSON. Ha! Ha! That's true enough, my dear, when you're standing for Parliament. Subscriptions extracted for every blessed society and institution in the place; from the home for lost tom-tits to tango-teas for charwomen! But I can afford to serve my country now. High time too! It'll go to the dogs unless men of courage and determination, of unflinching principle will come forward——

DOROTHY (*interrupting*). We're not the deputation, father.

ROBINSON. I suppose I've the right to say what I like in my own house to my own daughters.

MURIEL. It's always "my, my, my!"

ROBINSON. What the devil—(*then as if a light had suddenly dawned*). Ha! Still harping on what you choose to call your grievances!

DOROTHY. Look here, father, you must listen to us. You wouldn't the other day, you know.

ROBINSON. No, nor will I now.

DOROTHY. Oh, father, it is so silly——

ROBINSON. Silly! You dare to tell me that to my face!

MURIEL (*meaning to soothe him*). Well, father, not to listen—just for five minutes.

ROBINSON. Not to rubbish—even for one! (*speaking more gently*). Now I'm busy, so run upstairs and make yourselves look nice for the deputation.

DOROTHY (*goes up to the table, and resting the palms of her hands on it, bends towards him*). You've got to listen to this, father. We're tired of being just your possessions, of having no right to our own lives, nor yet to any thoughts and opinions that aren't yours. We might just as well be gramophones!

ROBINSON. Gramophones! You—you——

MURIEL. It's quite true, father.

ROBINSON. W—w—what's true?

DOROTHY. That we're fed up, absolutely fed up, and that if you won't give way——

ROBINSON (*springing to his feet*). Give way! I'm d—d if I do! I told you the other day that I won't have any of this "rights for women" nonsense in my house. It's ruining the country, breaking up homes, subversing public morality, and making women the—er—the deuce. It's the sickly sentimentality of the age, the infernal softness of the men, the man-apeing women! What are they coming to? Destroying churches, letters, golf-courses! And now it's my own daughters defying me! I won't have it. I won't have it! Another word and (*very masterfully*) you can both of you leave my house.

DOROTHY. That's exactly what we're going to do.

(ROBINSON *gapes at them.*)

MURIEL. And before the deputation comes.

ROBINSON (*quickly*). You'll do nothing of the sort.

DOROTHY. Ah! We're to do the pretty pretty! To be the subdued but necessary female chorus! "Votes for Robinson and women in their place!"

MURIEL (*ingratiatingly*). You want us to help to get you into Parliament, don't you, father?

ROBINSON. Help me, indeed! Nothing of the sort! But I wish you to see the deputation, and that's enough.

DOROTHY. We're not going to; we leave your house to-day, unless you agree to our terms. Now is that quite clear?

MURIEL. We don't want to be nasty——

ROBINSON (*furiously*). I tell you, once and for all, that I'll hear no more of this. I know what you're driving at. If you think you'll make me give way, you're very much mistaken, so the sooner you get that d—d ridiculous idea of being a doctor out of your head, Dorothy, the better. No daughter of mine shall ever be! Cutting people up, and knowing all about

their internal arrangements! It's revolting, disgusting, unwomanly!

DOROTHY. Nurses do.

ROBINSON. That's quite another matter. Nursing is essentially woman's work.

DOROTHY. Yes, it's too subordinate and—messy for men, isn't it?

ROBINSON. You're getting most infernally impertinent, Dorothy. I've a good mind to box your ears.

MURIEL (*impartially*). You gave that up a long time ago, I will say that for you.

ROBINSON. You will say that for me!

DOROTHY. Now, look here, father, you've bullied us these years——

ROBINSON. Bullied you!

DOROTHY. Oh, I don't think you meant to, but it's your idea of being a man, I suppose.

ROBINSON. My God! What next?

DOROTHY (*imperturbably*). Now we mean to go our own way, even if there is a devil of a row.

MURIEL (*uneasily*). I say, not too strong, Dorothy.

DOROTHY. So will you listen to what we have to say?

ROBINSON (*shouts*). No. To be spoken to like that in my own house by my own daughter!

DOROTHY. That's the trouble. I *am* your daughter.

ROBINSON. So it's my fault that you're behaving in this abominably undutiful way! (*Pants heavily.*) Will you have the kindness to leave the room?

DOROTHY. All right, but it's nearly half-past eleven, and the deputation——

ROBINSON (*controlling himself with an effort*). Well, say what you've got to say and be quick about it. Not that it'll make any difference. I'm not the man to trim my sails to suit women's whims. (*Sits at the table again.*)

DOROTHY. I mean to be a doctor. It's my voca-

tion. Neither you nor anybody has the right to stand between me and the work I was put into the world to do.

ROBINSON (*with dangerous quietness*). And supposing I refuse my consent—and money?

DOROTHY. Then I leave this house to-day—and for good.

ROBINSON (*furiously*). If you do, I'll cut you off with a shilling.

MURIEL (*distressed*). Father, why are you so hard, so unreasonable? Can't you see——

ROBINSON (*to DOROTHY, and disregarding MURIEL*). Now you've had your say, I'll have mine.

DOROTHY. We know it by heart.

MURIEL. Dorothy, don't!

ROBINSON. I decline to lose my temper. Now understand this. I utterly disapprove of these new-fangled notions that women have got into their heads, and no daughter of mine shall take up with them. It's ruining the country——

DOROTHY. We've heard that before.

ROBINSON. Hold your tongue! Woman's place is the home. I've always said, and I'll stick to it.

DOROTHY. Must you?

ROBINSON (*glaring ragefully*). If I'm the last man in England who's man enough to do so. You think you can turn the world upside-down and go against all the fundamental principles of life. But you can't, and you shan't, with my consent. What's going to happen when all women are earning their living and competing with men, and taking the bread out of their mouths? Who's going to look after the home, the husband, the children?

MURIEL. The women who want to. There'll always be enough.

ROBINSON. Then I don't agree with you. Besides, I disapprove of women having——

DOROTHY. Minds of their own, and views of their own, and incomes they make for themselves. Once

women are economically free (*snaps her fingers*), that much for man's superiority.

ROBINSON (*dumbfounded*). You mean to tell me that men are only superior to women because they make the money?

DOROTHY. Yes.

ROBINSON. And that from my own daughter!

DOROTHY. Nasty, isn't it?

ROBINSON (*recovering*). You don't know what you're talking about. Why, there's not one single thing that women do that men can't do better if they choose. And where are your Beethovens, Shakespeares, Edisons?

DOROTHY. Coming along presently. Your obsolete angels, chained to the hearths, hadn't much time for that sort of thing, you know.

ROBINSON. And a good thing, too. They made splendid wives and mothers, and that's what women are for. They've no business in the labour-market. It lowers men's wages; and creates bad feeling between the sexes; and no daughter of mine shall have part in it. Besides, you've got a comfortable, happy home, so why the deuce should you leave it? Many women would be glad of its shelter and protection.

DOROTHY. I'm speaking for myself.

ROBINSON. And thinking of yourself? Selfishness is the most detestable vice.

DOROTHY. In a woman?

ROBINSON (*heatedly*). Look here, Dorothy——

MURIEL (*soothingly*). She doesn't mean everything she says.

DOROTHY. Well, I mean to be a doctor.

ROBINSON. You'll be nothing of the sort. You'll stay at home as every woman would, if I had my way.

DOROTHY (*exasperated*). Oh, father, you are so hopelessly out of date. Your ideas are positively mouldy. We're not our grandmothers.

ROBINSON. A pity you aren't? Your grand-

mother was a much better woman than ever you will be.

DOROTHY. She died young, didn't she? (*reflectively*). I can just remember grandpapa. He was very like you.

ROBINSON. You're—you're enough to make a saint lose his temper. I—I——

DOROTHY. Well, the whole business is too sickening. You want to sacrifice my happiness to fusty, old-fashioned prejudices that are as dead as Queen Anne.

ROBINSON. What you choose to call fusty prejudices are principles, sound, honest, unshakable.

DOROTHY. If you prefer your principles to your daughter——

ROBINSON. I do. Have you anything more to say?

(*There is a pause. DOROTHY looks meaningfully at MURIEL, who fidgets nervously.*)

Then there's an end to the matter. Give me a whisky and soda, Muriel.

(*MURIEL does as she is asked.*)

DOROTHY (*maliciously, as MURIEL hands the drink*). That'll put some spirit into you; I think you'll want it.

ROBINSON (*puts down the glass*). What d'you mean?

DOROTHY. Muriel will tell you.

MURIEL. Father——

ROBINSON (*looking at his watch*). I can't listen to any more nonsense. It's getting on for twelve. Understand once and for all that I mean to be master in my house. Any more of this "advanced woman" tomfoolery, and I'll stop your allowances; that'll bring you to your senses.

MURIEL. But it's nothing to do with being "advanced," father.

DOROTHY (*laughing*). It's frightfully old-fashioned.

MURIEL. I—I—only want to marry Cyril.

ROBINSON. That painter fellow! An effeminate young ass! No money, and never will have. How's he going to support a wife, I should like to know? Ha! No prospects, no position. I told you the other day that I would never give my consent to a daughter of mine marrying a nincompoop and nobody like that!

MURIEL (*indignantly*). He isn't a nincompoop. He's very clever; one of the rising painters.

ROBINSON. Rising fiddlesticks! He's not the son-in-law for a man in my position. No morals, no principles, I'll be bound. No. From every point of view he's impossible.

MURIEL. Not from mine, father.

ROBINSON. What on earth can you see in the fellow?

MURIEL. I love him.

ROBINSON. Love! A girl of your age doesn't know the meaning of the word. Now there's young Lord Farringford.

DOROTHY. Soap and glory!

ROBINSON (*pointedly disregarding the interruption*). He's a good-looking young fellow of position, and able to keep a wife.

DOROTHY. Or a racing-stud, or anything that is his!

ROBINSON (*violently and exasperated*). Perhaps you'll kindly mind your own business, and leave me to mind mine.

MURIEL. But it *is* mine whom I marry. You don't seem to see that, so perhaps you better know at once that I'm engaged to Cyril, and that I mean to marry him.

ROBINSON. If you do, I'll cut you off with a shilling. My daughter the wife of a penniless painter!

MURIEL. Very well, then I shall leave your house too for good to-day, and your silly old deputation can go to the—devil.

(MRS. ROBINSON *comes in softly.*)

ROBINSON (*slowly*). My—silly old deputation—can go—to the devil! (*Sees MRS. ROBINSON.*) That's the sort of language, Madam, your daughters use to their father.

MRS. ROBINSON. They've never heard it from me, Henry.

ROBINSON. Humph! Ha! Well, that's neither here nor there. But I don't know what's come over the girls. Insulting and defying me! These Suffragettes, I suppose. But I won't have it, I won't have it. I'm one of the old Guard——

DOROTHY. For the preservation of masculine privileges.

ROBINSON. And why not? At least, it used to be one of men's proudest privileges to work for women.

DOROTHY. And keep them in cages, whether they would or not?

ROBINSON. Well, they were cared for; they didn't starve——

DOROTHY. Not their bodies, perhaps, but their souls——

ROBINSON. They're more likely to starve, body and soul, out in the hard, pitiless world than in a sheltered home.

MURIEL. But that's just where I want to be, father.

ROBINSON. With that milk-and-water jackanapes! You and your sister are behaving like perfect fools. It's a good thing you've got somebody to protect you from yourselves.

MRS. ROBINSON. Then you won't give way, Henry?

ROBINSON. No. I don't change my principles at the dictation of my daughters. (*Changes his tone.*) Now run upstairs like good girls, and get ready; the deputation will be here shortly.

MURIEL and DOROTHY (*together*). We won't.

ROBINSON. You won't!

DOROTHY. No.

(ROBINSON is about to burst into a rage again, but
MRS. ROBINSON raises a protesting hand.)

MRS. ROBINSON. Just one minute. Henry. (To the girls.) I want to speak to your father—privately.

DOROTHY. But, mother——

MRS. ROBINSON (smiling wanly). You needn't be afraid. Now go, please.

(They go out of the room with obvious reluctance. MURIEL, as she passes her mother, catches her hand and squeezes it quickly. ROBINSON, biting his fingers, stands watching.)

ROBINSON (peremptorily, when the door is closed). What have you to say, Mary?

MRS. ROBINSON. Will you try and listen quietly—please? It won't be very easy to say.

ROBINSON. Listen quietly when those daughters of yours—it's a pity you didn't bring them up better—have been irritating me past all bearing? And just at the time when I particularly wished to be—er—er——

MRS. ROBINSON. I quite understand. But if you could be calm, just for a few minutes. Time's getting on.

ROBINSON. Oh, all right! Let's have it out, though the very devil's in you all to-day. (Sits down with the air of a martyr.)

MRS. ROBINSON (draws a chair up to the table beside him). Henry, I ask you for my sake to let the girls do as they wish—please! Don't stand in the way of their happiness. It isn't right.

ROBINSON (fidgets uneasily). It's a question of lifelong conviction and principle. You don't understand that. Women never do; that's why I say they've no business in public life!

MRS. ROBINSON. Nobody has the right to impose their principles on other people, and perhaps ruin their lives.

ROBINSON (*springing to his feet*). Then you're in league against me too!

MRS. ROBINSON. It's my children! I can't stand by and see them made unhappy.

ROBINSON. You of all people defying my authority!

MRS. ROBINSON. Oh, I didn't want to. It's not for myself. I—I don't like doing it. Oh, do, do be sensible! It's so hateful, all this.

ROBINSON (*violently*). By God, I won't! Beaten by women, by my own wife and daughters! Women are trying to get the whip hand, and once they do, the country, will go to the dogs. A pretty state of things!

MRS. ROBINSON (*sighs heavily*). Oh, why can't you understand that things have changed since we were young? You're trying to put back the hands of the clock. It's no good, and only makes us all unhappy. Do be sensible—and kind. After all, they're your own children.

ROBINSON. That's just it. I know what's good for them better than they do themselves.

MRS. ROBINSON. Then you won't give in?

ROBINSON. No.

MRS. ROBINSON (*puts her arm on his sleeve in entreaty*). Oh, Henry——

(ROBINSON *moves away*.)

MRS. ROBINSON. Then I must take the law into my own hands.

ROBINSON (*stupefied and speaking slowly*). You—take the law——

MRS. ROBINSON. The income from the money that Uncle James has just left me shall be divided between Dorothy and Muriel.

ROBINSON. W—w—what d'you say?

MRS. ROBINSON. That will make them independent.

ROBINSON (*striding up and down the room*). And what about my parliamentary expenses? They'll sure to be heavy. Beesbridge is a notoriously wobbling constituency.

MRS. ROBINSON. I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid you'll have to manage without it. You can economize by reducing your racing stud, or——

ROBINSON. I shall spend my money as I choose.

MRS. ROBINSON (*with gentle firmness*). And I, mine.

(DOROTHY *putting her head in the door*.)

DOROTHY. The deputation is coming up the steps!

ROBINSON (*savagely*). Damnation! (*bites his fingers*). Then you mean to go against my expressed wishes. Take care, Mary!

MRS. ROBINSON (*distressed*). No, no! But I know what it means. I can't let my daughters go through it. I had no money (*pauses, then goes on as if oblivious for the moment of him*). I had never been taught to earn a living. I loved somebody else, but I had to——(*stops short, horrified, realizing what she is saying*).

ROBINSON (*very quietly*). You had to——?

MRS. ROBINSON. Oh, Henry, I didn't mean to say that. I didn't want to hurt you. It—it slipped out.

ROBINSON. You had to marry me against your wishes?

MRS. ROBINSON (*more than ever distressed*). Oh, but I'm used to you now, Henry.

ROBINSON. Used to me! (*after a pause*). And that after all these years together! And I loved you, Mary.

MRS. ROBINSON (*sighs*). Yes, in your own way I know you did.

ROBINSON (*irritably*). Well, of course. How else? But women are the deuce.

MRS. ROBINSON. They had to be, but they won't much longer.

ROBINSON. What d'you mean?

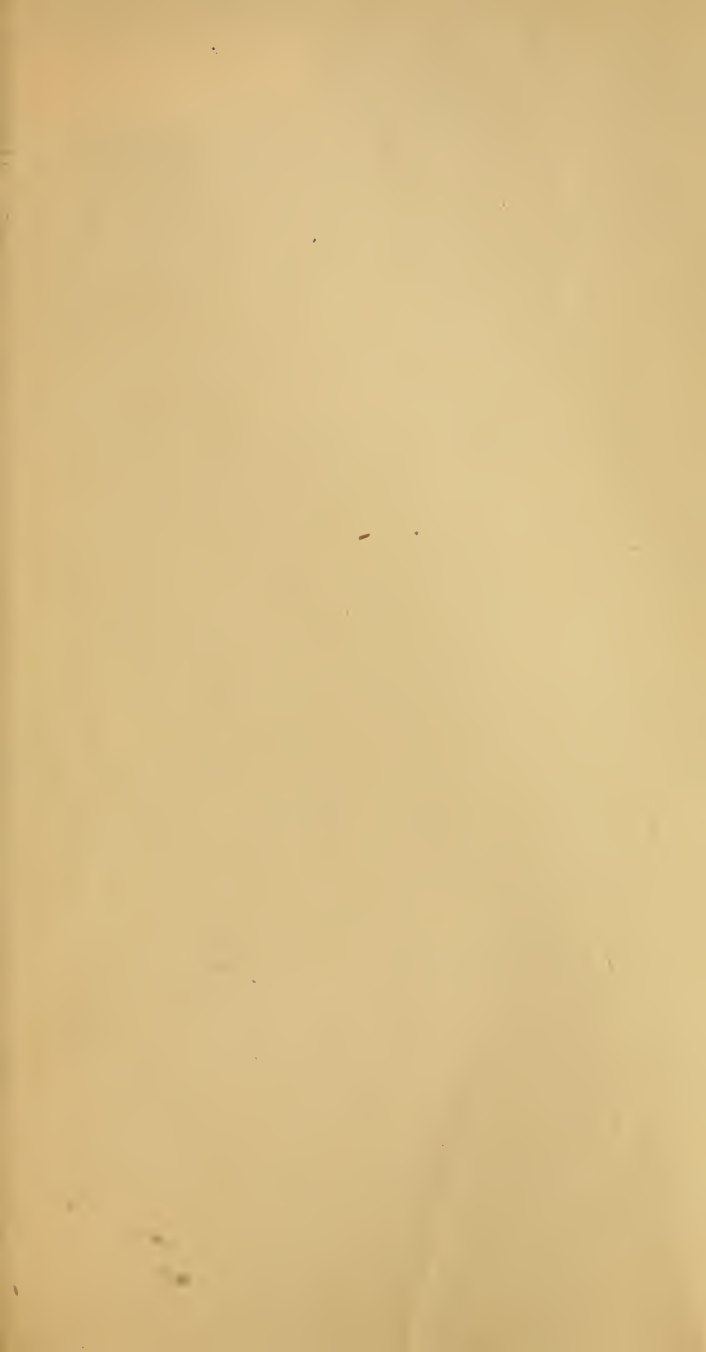
MRS. ROBINSON. It's not good for men that women should be their absolute property.

ROBINSON. You a new woman, too!

MRS. ROBINSON (*with a flicker of a smile*). Oh, no! It's too late! (ROBINSON *stares at her as if an astonishing truth had flashed upon him.*)

ROBINSON (*as if to himself*). Men's absolute property! Too late! (*After a pause.*) Well, let the girls have their way (*with a return of the old manner*). But it's the last time, mind (*after a pause, and as if to reassert his supremacy*). And I'll have nothing to do with "Votes for Women."

CURTAIN.



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